567 spoke of ôlo (or mon ôlo) or étu'a as against nti (nté) or mo'nti, the latter word meaning freeman, civis. However, all the late nineteenth century writers agree that the Pahouin did not know of slavery and, closer to our period, L. Mba repeats the assertion, declaring that belô [727] or minsagha were not slaves but prisoners of war "considered part of the spoils" (no. 120).

Nevertheless, it does indeed seem that there were genuine com- 567 mercial transactions, selling and buying of these captives or, at any 727 rate, of the bitu'a, whose position must have been different from that of the bo' belo. The latter were more likely prisoners subject to ransom (ngôtô = ransom) or hostages; I have personally known elderly Boulou men of good family who were prisoners of the Bané in the way after the 1885 ôban /war/. They had been treated as men not as chattel, taking part in noble masculine activities such as hunting, but not in work considered menial like porterage. Some of them married Bané girls at the time of the treaty which followed the ôban; others were adopted by Bané clans. In their case one certainly could not speak of slavery.

567 The position was not the same for the bitu'a (1), who were, as I

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1. Sometimes called bityi'ityi'a, the mutilated, the gashed, because their ears were slashed.

made the objects of commercial transactions, of sales, and not simply put in pawn. First lieutenant Dominick, for instance, bought outright from Ewôndo chiefs part of his complement of porters. These bitu'a were not Pahouin but foreign prisoners from neighboring tribes or the original inhabitants of conquered territory. Therefore it is perhaps correct to say that the Pahouin had no slaves among themselves of their own, but not that they were unacquainted with slavery. They certainly made little use of it, preferring to exchange captives for merchandise from the coastal or river tribes who specialized in trade. Besides, the children of belô or of bitu'a born within a clan must have been pretty easily absorbed if one of the parents belonged to the clan.

563 At the present time, in any case, the distinction between bo' beti 565 and bo' belo is very fine drawn (2), not to say obliterated, if only

6:Alexandre and Binet--75 G-5 (1946-1954) 1958 FH9 Fang FH9
Cameroon Pygmies FH 4
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2. This division of the population into three categories, noble tribes (Beti), vassal but free tribes, and servile groups, is still evident in certain border regions: the ethnic map in manuscript prepared by the government officer Bøtti (in accordance with the 1954 genealogical census, of the Okola subdivision (Nyong and Sanaga, the Cameroons) distinguishes between the Eton Beti (lords), the Eton Beloa (vassals), and the Beloa Beton (enslaved). (J. B.)

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because /59/ people tend to forget genealogies. Nevertheless, there survives a condition that is not without a suggestion of serfdom, that of the Pygmies. They would appear to belong to three "tribes" — Babinga /Binga/ in the east, Bibaya in the center, Beye'ele or Bajieli /Jelli (Bayele, Badiele)/ in the west. They live in small family bands and are nomadic hunters within a limited area. These small hordes are said to "belong" to Pahouin families or individuals. The Pygmies hunt for their "owner," keep him supplied with meat, skins, ivory, medicinal plants and receive from him in return salt, spear-heads, sabers, cloth, and cultivated foodstuffs. They do not have the right—and this is the important point—to carry on such dealings with another "owner," and the "owner" may prosecute anyone infringing his monopoly. Even more, he has a feudal lord's right of pursuit /droit de suite/ should "his" Pygmies try to escape and to become nomadic inhabitants in the territory of another village. He may also cede his rights over "his" Pygmies to another Pahouin, but not the Pygmies themselves. Here again then there is no slavery in the Roman sense of the word. Moreover, it appears that the "owner's" rights over "his" Pygmies derive originally from a reciprocal contract, a sort of alliance between the two groups, the balance of which was later upset in favor of the invaders. Within recent years a trend may be observed toward the emancipation of the Pygmies. They are now very crossbred; they use the language of their masters and seem to have preserved of their own only the technical and ritual vocabulary, of which the little that is known appears to be related for the most part to the dialects of Bantu tribes driven back by the Pahouin invasion. Crossbred groups that have been sedentary for several generations, the

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Bekôé, are now assimilated and are considered a special Pahouin ayôn (see above, p. 54). But the nomadic groups themselves are beginning to give up the obligatory intermediation of the Pahouin in order to sell their game; they are to be seen at markets and even in government offices and in the courts.

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Foreigners, bone bikul (ékul = foreign tribe), had no rights except as guests or hosts, beyeñ (sing. nneñ), which means that they had in fact to buy security. Since European conquest there has been an increase in the betabe (from tabe = to stay, to dwell), privileged strangers admitted to residence by the head of a family or village, often allied by marriage to the clan amid which they have settled. Their children can be absorbed but are not true bo'beti, at least not in the first generations.

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Thus truly Pahouin society was and remains very much a closed one, since entrance into it is, in practice, only by blood. On the other hand, it is very little stratified internally, outside of age grades; it might even be said to be averse to hierarchies.

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At first one is rather tempted to conclude that there are no castes. This statement is perhaps too sweeping, if we take into consideration the fact that certain endogamous clans like the Ndôñ are perhaps castes or represent former castes. The subject deserves further study. /60/

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Does Pahouin society admit of social classes based on birth or wealth? In spite of the egalitarian and anarchic temperament of the Pahouin, I think this is so. Terminology proves it by distinguishing the bo' beti not only from the captives but even from the zesé bôt, the humble people: mo'nti is often translated today as "Monsieur." Within the last two generations there has grown up before our eyes a real bourgeoisie of large-scale planters, clerks (bekilak), artisans, and skilled workmen, which is inclined to stand out against a lower class of small peasants, laborers, and even, at the moment, of a "proletariat in sunglasses" — petty tradesmen, etc. —a local equivalent of our white-collar workers. Already in traditional society the minkukum, the rich, were to be distinguished from the common people, the zesé bôt.

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The rich were looked at askance and were objects of suspicion to the general public, always quick to attribute material success to the possession of an évu (évur, évus), to malevolent sorcery. The

nkukum had to excuse his wealth, primarily by distributing it through customary hospitality and also by a special device of economic-social control resembling the potlatch, the bilaba.

This practice seems to have been especially common among the Boulou. Bertaut relates the word to a Ngumba root meaning "to talk," "to cajole." I should rather incline toward a derivative of the verb lap, "to draw water," by extension "to splash," which can figuratively also convey the idea of scoffing. It is not impossible that the bilaba mechanism was connected with that of the joking relationship, awuso. The bilaba begins with a challenge from one nkukum to another, each man claiming to be the richer. The challenger goes to the house of the challenged, carrying a load of merchandise, mebo me dulu, "legs for the journey," and accompanied by a large retinue of musicians and singers, etc. When he reaches the home of the other njem bilaba (bilaba dancer), he overwhelms him with presents and taunts; his opposite number replies, present for present and jeer for jeer, until he has contributed more than the equivalent of the mebo me dulu. The first njem bilaba goes home and waits for the other's return visit with his own mebo me dulu. Visits and countervisits may go on for a long time, each of the bejem bilaba calling on his immediate family for help, then upon his lineage or clan, for continued supplies. The bilaba therefore comes to be a collective affair. It must be observed that not just any kind of merchandise is exchanged: a njem bilaba in the east (nku, oku) provides local products, (livestock, cacao, ivory, etc.), in the west (nké) imported products (loincloths, salt, powder, etc.) (1). It should be remembered /61/ in this

1. M. Zoll'Owambe (no. 125) speaks of akum so, "merchandise of the north," imports, and of akum nsak, "merchandise of the south," products of the country. But there appears to have been some confusion. In fact, so = coast, downstream, is related to nké = west, which also means downstream, while nsak = hinterland, upstream (nku = east, related to kui = to come from, rise from, emerge); cf. Largeau, who considers the north to be on the right (male) and the south on the left (female). Imported products would be considered male.

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552 connection that the points of the compass have a sexual implication,
565 which is not well understood. The bilaba sets up a sort of joking re-
623 lationship between the families of the participants, which may con-
631 tinue after their death.

The institution seems to be dying out, though it was still flourishing between the two /World?/ wars and often involved considerable amounts of money (1).

1. Balandier (no. 175 and in a personal communication) stresses the economic importance of the bilaba which, in a society without a money or trade economy, constituted one of the principal means of circulating goods and, especially, of diffusing imported commodities.

556 In spite of the fear his success inspires, and perhaps because of
622 this fear, the rich man enjoyed undoubted authority in his village and sometimes beyond it. Nkukuma, the absolute form of nkukum, is used to translate "chief" (it probably means, more precisely, "person of note").

554 The word évet, also applied to subchiefs or government "capitas"
622 is likewise used —a correct nuance if, as Bates says, évet is a corruption of headman applied originally to the chiefs of trade caravans. These men were chosen for their business astuteness, diplomacy, authority, and courage, but they were only deputies of a clan or village, not true political chiefs. To convey the latter implication the preferable term is still njôô bôt (Fang, nzoé mur) from jô = to say, to command, a term indicating a de facto state, /état de fait/ rather than a legal notion. It should be recalled that there were no political leaders other than the seniors, mintôl, of the extended families. Their authority was further limited by the ease with which their brothers could leave the village to establish another nearby (2).

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622 2. But among some Pahouinized peoples the existence of royal insignia shows that chiefship /chefferie/ is an institution: among the Ewôndo and Yanda the head of the clan designated his successor or, if he

Next, the establishment of urban and rural municipal councils permits financial decentralization. Towns under the term "urban communes," cantons, and sometimes whole subdivisions under the term "rural communes," received a legal character, with a domain to manage and a budget to fix. Elected councilors under an appointed mayor had to study plans for road works, to set up construction or maintenance programs, inquire into taxes? /taxes/ and assessments /impôts/, and have an eye to a sound financial position.

In towns this was nothing new, but its extension to wide rural areas was an experiment. Boulou or Beti country, where there was no risk of these new methods giving offense to a strong traditional /social/ structure, was the ideal place for trying out a new /kind of/ organization.

Throughout the elections arranged to fill the posts of councilor, we can see crystallizing the most striking traits of the new élite, the characteristics of the aristocracy or oligarchy that will get itself into power.

Pessimists had expressed fear that such elections, based on almost universal suffrage, would overthrow the classical social values and impair the prestige of the present acting élite.

This point of view disregarded the fact that in a country practically without stratification, no one can keep authority without the support of public opinion. /132/ Granting the vote to vassals in a feudal society may unsettle the power of the nobility. It is quite otherwise here, where chiefs of village or canton are most commonly chosen by election.

The older men have preserved a privileged position vis-à-vis the younger generation. A comparison of the age pyramid of councilors with that of the adult male population as a whole readily shows this: (table on following page).

The younger generation is poorly represented. Mature men of thirty to forty are represented in proportion to their ratio in the total population; but men of forty to fifty or of the older age group are heavily represented. Electoral influence has not been seized by the younger men.

Neither does it appear that the poorer class, more numerous than the rich, has benefited from the ballot so as to eliminate the latter. From the point of view of the possession of a certain amount of wealth, we can assert that municipal councilors are much better off than the common people.